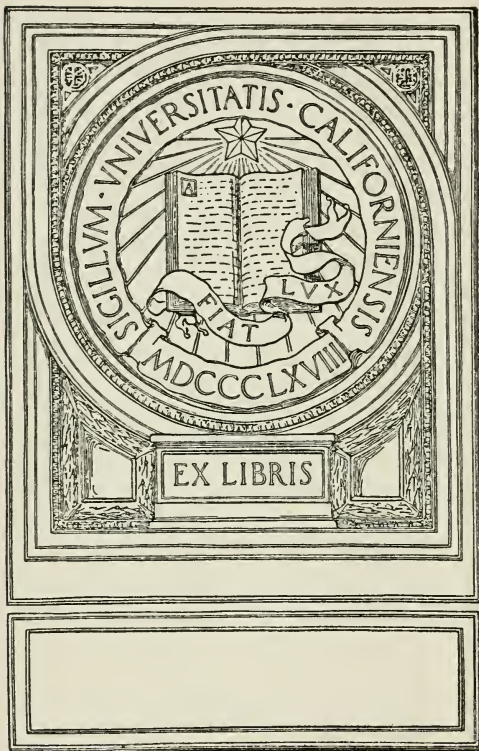


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THE
ELECTRA OF SOPHOCLES

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH PROSE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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THE ELECTRA

Dramatis Personae

ELECTRA

ORESTES

CLYTAEMNESTRA

AEGISTHUS

CHRYSOTHEMIS

PAEDAGOGUS

CHORUS OF MYCENAEAN WOMEN

PYLADES

THE ELECTRA

Scene—*Mycenae, before the palace of the Pelopidae.*

Time—*Morning.*

(*Enter Paedagogus, Orestes, and Pylades.*)

PAED. O child of Agamemnon who erst was leader of our host at Troy, now is it granted thee to see before thy face all the scene whereof thou wert ever fain. Yonder lies the ancestral Argos to which thy heart went out, the sacred region of Inachus' daughter whom the gadfly drave : and this, Orestes, is the gathering-place by the Wolf-shrine, holy to the god that slays the wolf ; and the fane yonder on our left is Hera's renownèd temple ; and here before us, as we pause, assure thyself that thou seest Mycenae of the golden store ; and yonder is the palace of Pelops' race, the house of murders manifold. Thence I bore thee once from thy father's bloody doom, receiving thee from a kindred hand, even thy sister's, and saved thee and fostered thee to the age that now is thine, to requite the murder of thy father. So now, Orestes, and thou, Pylades, dearest of stranger folk, we must hold counsel quickly, how it befits to

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act ; for already in our ears the sun's bright gleam awakes to clear notes the matin chirp of birds, and dark night with its stars has waned away. Ere then any wight come forth from the house, do ye twain combine in speech, since we stand on that edge of circumstance where need is no longer to dally but to do.

OR. O best-beloved of serving men, by what clear proofs thou showest thy loyalty to usward ! For even as a high-bred steed, though he be old, pricks his ears erect nor loses heart in the press of fight, even so thou dost both urge us forward and art thyself among the foremost that follow. Therefore will I unfold our resolves ; and do thou for thy part, keenly marking my words, correct me in aught wherein I aim amiss. For when I came unto the Pythian oracle, to learn in what wise I might achieve just vengeance for my sire on those who slew him, Phoebus uttered such prophecy as in this moment thou shalt learn. Alone— he said—without fence of shield or armed company, thou must snatch by craft the chance of dealing with thine own hand the rightful blow. Since then we have heard such utterance, go thou when opportunity takes thee by the hand, and entering yon palace learn all that is passing therein, that with perfect knowledge thou mayest tell all plainly unto us. Have no fear of their recognising thee ; long is it since they saw thee, and thou art changed with eld, nor shall they suspect

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thee, with thine hair thus blossomed white. Employ too some such tale as this—that thou art a Phocian stranger, come hither from the chieftain Phanoteus; for he is, as it haps, their doughtiest ally: and report, confirming thy tidings with an oath, that by a fateful chance Orestes is no more, having been flung and trailed from his whirling car at the Pythian games: so, let the fable stand. We meantime, first crowning my father's grave, as the oracle bade, with poured libations and adornments of shorn hair, anon will be here again, holding uplifted in our hands a figured brass-encompassed urn, which, as thou too, methinks, dost know, lies hidden in the brushwood here—that thus by sleight of speech we may pass on them a rumour, welcome to their ears, that my dead body, flame-wasted already and calcined, hath passed to nothingness. (For how doth this pretence irk me, when, if in rumour I be dead, in act I shall have held my life and borne off the prize of glory?) No rumour, as I deem, that wins its end, hath ill-omened sound. Oft ere this have I known of men, aye, men held for wise, who in rumour came unto a death that was not death; and then, when they have come once more to their homes, immediately greater honour has been theirs. Even so vaunt I of myself, that, by means of this bruited death, I shall yet start to life, before the eyes of hatred, and gleam as a star. But thou, O father-

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land, and ye, O Gods of this home, take me to your heart, that I prosper in this emprise ! thou too, O palace of my sires !—for, as purger of thy pollution, by divine behest am I come—send me not forth in dishonoured exile from this land, but give me back our ancient wealth and let me stablish our home anew ! Thus then my prayer is said ; do thou, old man, go in with speed, be watchful over thy commission ; and we twain will go forth ; for Occasion is here, chief captain of any enterprise for men.

ELECT. (*From within.*) Woe, woe is me !

PAED. Hist ! through the doors I seemed to hear some hand-maiden wailing within the house, O child !

OR. Can it be Electra the forlorn ? wilt thou that we abide here and listen to her laments ?

PAED. Not so, not so ! Before all else, let us strive to do the commands of Loxias and make them our auspices, laving with lustral waters thy father's grave : for that brings victory within our reach, and triumph in each step achieved. (*Exeunt. Enter Electra.*)

ELECT. O hallowed Light ! and thou, Air, with equal scope embracing Earth ! how many a chanted dirge of mine hast thou marked, how many a blow struck full upon this bosom blood-imbrued, when-soe'er the gloom of night has waned : and, for my nightlong festival, too well the loathèd couches of this woeful home could tell how oft I bewail

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mine ill-fated sire ! Him in no barbarian land did murderous Ares draw to his feast ; but my mother, mine, and her adulterous Aegisthus clove his head with reeking battle-axe, as woodmen cleave an oak : and for these deeds no woman but I doth pour the tide of tears—for thee, my father, thus dead in shameful and piteous wise. Yet never, never will I pause from wailings and rueful cries, so long as mine eyes behold the glowing twinkling stars, or yonder dawning day—never cease from echoing forth, even as some nightingale bereaved of her brood, a note of constant wail in the ears of all, here before the doors of my sire. O palace of Hades and Persephone, O Hermes, Guide to the underworld, and thou, O solemn Curse, and ye awful Furies, born of Gods ! ye who keep watch over mortal men slain wrongfully, and over those whose bed is by craft defiled, hither to us ! be champions and avengers of our father's slaying, and send back to me my brother ; for, alone, I avail not to bear up against grief's heavy counterpoise.) (Enter Chorus.)

she pray

CHOR. Alas, Electra ! child, child of a wretchless mother, in what unstayed lament dost thou ever pine away, mourning for Agamemnon trapped of old in most godless wise by the guile of thy treacherous mother, and given o'er to death by a coward hand ? (Death be on that sin's contriver—if such prayer be lawful for my lips.

Can you really not find

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ELECT. Ah, high-born souls, ye are come to the solacing of my woes! I know, yea I wot well your intent, nor doth aught thereof elude me; yet will I not to desert my purpose nor leave my moanings over my unhappy father! But ye, who requite each grace of manifold kindness, leave me to wander thus distraught! alas, alas, 'tis my one prayer!

CHOR. Yet him, thy sire, ne'er shalt thou raise up, by cries or prayers, from Hades' lake, the bourn of all men. But, breaking from restraint away to despairing grief, ever moaning thou pinest to thy death; nor in thy sorrow is any release from ills.

→ Say, wherefore is thy desire unto wretchedness?

ELECT. Heedless is the child who can forget a parent's piteous death! But for me, the sister of my soul is the plaintive bird distraught with sorrow, the messenger of Zeus, wailing ever Itys, Itys, well-a-day! Ah, Niobe, queen of despair! thou in mine eyes hast a lot divine! thou who, entombed in the cavern of the rock, dost flow eternally with tears.

CHOR. Not for thee only among mortals, O child, hath grief arisen; grief, wherein thou dost outdo those dwelling here within, whose sister thou art by joint parentage and kindred blood; Chrysothemis I mean, yet living, and Iphianassa, and him that mourns apart, secluded in his hour of youth, yet with

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this bliss to come, that Mycenae's glorious land shall one day greet him to his heritage of honour, hither coming through grace and guidance of Zeus, restored to this land, Orestes' self!

ELECT. Yet for him do I wait unrestingly, and roam in long dreariness, childless and unwedded, tear-drenched and enduring the fruitless weird of sorrow: while he forgets the wrongs he has endured and mine whereof he hears! For to me what rumour of him cometh that is not foiled of truth? he is longing, ever longing, to be here, yet for all his longing, chooses not to arrive.

CHOR. Take cheer, take cheer, O child! Zeus is yet lord in heaven, and he watcheth all things and ruleth in power. To him commit the anger that overflows with pain, and chafe not overmuch at those whom thou hatest, nor yet forget them quite. For Time is a god who achieves his will in gentleness: not heedless is he, the child of Agamemnon, who dwells by Crisa and the kine-pastured margin of the sea—nor he who rules as god by Acheron.

ELECT. Nay, but from me the more part of life hath by now waned away without hope, and (I can bear up no more); for in orphan state I waste away, and for me no beloved husband comes as champion, but like some scornèd alien I tend the chambers of my father, clad thus in shameful garb, or minister at scantèd tables.)

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CHOR. Boding was the cry at the home-coming, and boding where thy father lay, what time the blow of the brazen axe-head was struck home on him. Craft was the prompter, Lust the slayer, in fearful wise embodying a fearful spectre of crime!—whether he were a god, or, may be, of mortals, who wrought this deed!

ELECT. Ah me, the coming of that day, loathed by me beyond all others! Ah, the night, ah, the feast ineffable, terrible, burdening the soul! whereat my sire saw death manifold, hideous, wrought by two right hands that betrayed and made prey of my life, and wrought my doom. Them may the high Olympian god requite with ruthless revenge; nor let them ever win joy of their splendour, for that they wrought such deeds.

CHOR. Beware! speak thus no more; heedest thou not by what moods thou fallest ruefully, as now, into sorrows self-caused? For thou dost enhance thy woes an hundredfold, ever breeding strife upon strife by thy sullenness of soul: such war is ill to wage, matching thee against the strong.

ELECT. Dreadful, aye, dreadful were the forces that constrained me; I wot right well of my wrathfulness, yet even though beset with tyranny I will not curb the passion of this sorrow, so long as life is mine. For in whose sight, O kindly company of friends! were he of righteous discernment, could I

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hear aught of seemly comfort? Restrain me not, restrain me not, ye who would solace me! for these woes shall be accounted beyond release, nor will I ever cease from sorrow, lost in endless reckoning of tears!

CHOR. Yet none the less in kindness, like some true mother I warn thee, breed not new desperation added to the old.

ELECT. Go to, is not my misery unmeasured? Say, how were it honourable to be heedless of the slain? in whom of men is such hardness born? Never may I stand in honour with these ill-doers, nor, if chance set me side by side with prosperity, may I dwell at ease therewith, furling the wings of my shrill lament, to the dishonour of my sire. [For if the dead shall be lapped in earth and as one that is not, and they who slew shall not atone in blood for the slaying, then were all reverence, all natural piety, gone from the world of men.]

CHOR. I verily, O child, came hither with thy cause and mine alike at heart—yet, if I speak not in season, let thy will prevail, for thee will we follow close.

ELECT. I am ashamed indeed, O maidens, if with my many wailings I seem to you impatient overmuch. Yet since force itself constrains me thereto, forgive me! for how should any one, a woman and well-born, not do as I do when she sees a curse upon her

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① father's house? such curse as, day and night, I watch,
and see it waxing rather than waning. To me,
② firstly indeed the love of my mother that bore me
hath turned to utter hate; and next, needs must I
dwell, in mine own halls, side by side with my sire's
murderers; and by them am I held down, and from
their hand is it my lot alike to be fed or to be stinted.
And more—how deemest thou of the days that I
must spend, when I behold Aegisthus throned in my
father's seat, and watch him wearing the same royal
raiment that my father wore, and pouring libations
at the very altar beside which he slew him? aye,
and when I see the crowning outrage of all—the
④ slayer of his kinsman, couching—faugh! in my
father's chamber, in my wretchless mother's arms—
if mother one may call her who can couch with one
like him! For so lost is she, that she dwells with him
who is pollution's very self, and she fears no avenging
Fury; but, as if exulting in what is wrought, she reckons
up the return of that day on which heretofore she
slew my father by a wile, and ordains the dance there-
on and renders the monthly rites of slaughtered kine
unto her protecting gods. And I, the ill-fated, watch-
ing all this within, do weep and waste away, and
mourn with cries over the ghastly banquet styled
after my sire—yet privily with myself, for weep I
may not to such fill as my desire is fain. For she,
the woman noble in pretence alone, cries out on

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me and reviles me with curses like these—*Out on thee, thou heaven-scorned loathly thing ! hath none but thou lost a father ? is no other mortal bereaved ? Ill end be thine ! and may the nether powers release thee never from thy present wailings !* So piles she taunt on taunt, save when rumour reaches her that Orestes will return ; then indeed she stands o'er me and wildly raves—*Art not thou cause of this danger ? is not this thing of thy doing, since it was thou that didst convey Orestes from my reach and didst set him secretly afar ? But rest assured that thou shalt pay due meed of thy mischief !* So she snarls her hate, and hard at her side, egging on her wrath in speech like hers, stands that redoubtable paramour of hers, a man unsexed to utter cowardice, the veriest bane on earth, one who dares not strike unless women aid ! And I—woe is me !—waiting ever for Orestes to come, who shall free me from this plight, I pine to nothingness. For by his ever-renewed delay before doing, he hath ruined all my hopes both near and far. In such case, O loving hearts, no room is there for prudence, none for piety ; but, in the press of evils, deep need is there to do, as well as suffer, wrong.

CHOR. Prithee say, dost thou so speak unto us with Aegisthus hard at hand, or gone from home ?

ELECT. He is away, be sure ! deem not that, if he were near, I could roam without the doors ; but now, as hap wills, he is afield.

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CHOR. Then might I with better heart come into converse with thee, since that is truly so?

ELECT. As verily he is absent, ask on! what is thy will?

CHOR. Then this I ask thee—what hast thou to tell of thy brother? is he near, or tarries he yet? fain am I to know.

ELECT. He giveth words of promise; but, promising, doeth nought in fulfilment.

CHOR. Still, he who hath in hand an enterprise of great moment is apt to tarry.

ELECT. Yet in good truth I tarried not when I plucked him from death!

CHOR. Take heart! his nature is loyal, and will not fail his friends.

ELECT. I feel that faith—else I had not lived thus long!

CHOR. Hush! now, not another word—for I descry thy sister, born of the same sire and of one mother with thee, even Chrysothemis, bearing forth in her hands grave-gifts, such as use awards unto the dead.

(Enter Chrysothemis.)

CHRY. What cry, O sister, dost thou shrill forth anew, here standing at the portal's outlet? art thou still unwilling to be taught, even by livelong time, not to indulge a helpless wrath in vain? Howbeit, this much at least I know of myself, that I am sore vexed with our case—so deeply that, could I

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but summon strength, I would reveal what I feel towards them. But as it stands I deem it best to sail close-reefed in a storm, best not to make some active show of hate yet hurt them not at all : and as I do I am fain that thou shouldest do also. Yet, none the less, Right is not with my pleading but with thy resolve ; but (if I would live as one free, 'tis wise to obey in all things those who hold the sway.)

ELECT. Aye—yet it is foul shame that thou, child of such a father as thine, shouldest forget him and heed thy mother only. For each rebuke of me that thou utterest was taught thee by her, and as of thyself thou sayest nought. Well, choose thy course at any rate—either my unwisdom, or prudence and therewith forgetfulness of friends ! For thou didst say but now that, couldst thou but win strength, thou wouldst make manifest thine hate of these : yet when I scheme manifold vengeance for my sire, thou hast no hand to help, but thwartest me who strive. Is not this cowardice, besides our other ills ? if not—tell me or learn of me what gain were mine if I ceased from these wailings ? Is not life mine still—life ill bested, I know, yet for me sufficient ? And I am a thorn to those who rule here, so that I make honour reach unto the dead, if aught can do them pleasure there. But thou and thine hatred—out upon it ! thou hatest in word, but in act thou art at one with our father's

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murderers. I verily would never, not even if one should proffer to me those comforts in which thou liest at ease, bend my will to theirs ! for thee, be the table spread with fatness and life o'erflow with abundance ; for me, be this my only food, that I pain not my own heart ! for I crave not at all to win such privilege as thou hast—nor wouldst thou, if thou wert sound of soul ! as it stands, do thou, with the chance to be named the daughter of Earth's noblest chieftain, go, get thee called thy mother's child ; so shalt thou gain disrepute of many, by disloyalty to thy dead sire and true kinsfolk !

CHOR. Nay, by the gods, give not place to wrath ; for in the words of both is profit, couldst thou but learn to use hers aright, and she in turn to use thine.

CHRY. I verily, O maidens, am something familiar with her talk, nor would I have said aught of all this, had I not heard of a most mighty evil, imminent over her, which will stay her for ever from these protracted wailings.

ELECT. Out with thy grim tale then ! for if thou hast aught to tell worse than my present plight, I will gainsay thee no more.

CHRY. Well, verily will I reveal all that I myself have learned. They have laid their intent, unless thou pause from this ado, to send thee thither where thou wilt see no more the sunlight, but in caverned dungeon, outside the limit of this land,

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thou wilt in living death chant dirges for thy woes. Hereon take heed, and blame me not if in the after time thou comest to suffering—for now is the fair chance to be wise.

ELECT. Have they in real truth resolved to deal thus with me ?

CHRY. Aye, in sooth—whenever Aegisthus comes home.

ELECT. Nay then, let him come quickly, if that be all.

CHRY. Ah, desperate heart, what word of cursing hast thou said ?

ELECT. That he may come—if his intent be aught like this——

CHRY. That thou mayest suffer what despite ? art thou distraught ?

ELECT. That, far as can be, I may be sundered from you.

CHRY. What, hast thou no heed of the life that is with thee still ?

ELECT. Rare, truly, is my life, and worthy of envy !

CHRY. Well, such it might be, didst thou but know the temper of the wise.

ELECT. Lesson me not in cowardice towards my friends !

CHRY. Not therein do I lesson thee, but in deference to those who rule.

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ELECT. Do thou that fawning ! the mood thou namest is not mine !

CHRY. Yet is it well not to fall through wild counsel.

ELECT. Fall will I, if need be, in avenging my sire.

CHRY. Yet hath my sire forgiveness for my yielding, well I ween.

ELECT. These are words for cowards to commend.

CHRY. Nay, wilt thou not yield and acquiesce, with me ?

ELECT. Never ! long be it ere I be so void of conscience.

CHRY. Then must I forward on the path whereon I was sent.

ELECT. And whither farest thou, and to whom dost bear these offerings ?

CHRY. Our mother sends me to offer these libations at our father's grave.

ELECT. What sayst thou ? sends she them to her most deadly foe ?

CHRY. "To him whom she slew"—fain art thou to say that word.

ELECT. Induced by what friend ? to whom was this act well-pleasing ?

CHRY. Induced, methinks, by some terror of a nightly dream.

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ELECT. Ye gods of my race! be ye now, if ever,
at my side!

CHRYE. Is thine heart cheered, concerning this
terror of hers?

ELECT. Wouldst thou tell me the vision, I would
then tell thee my thought.

CHRYE. Nay, I know not to tell of it, save in some
small part.

ELECT. Ah, tell me that, I pray! truly, ere now,
short tidings have wrought fall or safety for men!

CHRYE. 'Tis whispered that she hath seen once
more the presence of thy sire and mine, returning
to the light of day; then he took the sceptre, borne
by himself of old, and now by Aegisthus, and planted
it by the hearth; then from it sprang a sapling and
waxed upwards, and all the land of the Myceneans
was shadowed with it. Such tale I heard told by
him who stood anear what time she declared the
vision to the Sun-God. But more than this I have
not learned, save that she sends me on this errand
because of that scaring dream. Therefore by all the
gods of our race I entreat thee to obey me, and not
to fall through ill-advised resolve; for if thou wilt
thrust me away, thou wilt come to me again with
sorrow at thy side!

ELECT. Stay, sister dear, nor suffer aught of what
thine hands hold to touch the tomb! Unlawful it
were, and impious, to set there funeral gifts from a

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treacherous wife, or by her behest to pour libations for thy sire. Nay, fling them to the winds, or hide them in dust of deep-delvèd soil, where nought of these gifts shall ever reach to my sire's bed of rest—but let them lie safe below, treasures for her parted soul whene'er she die. Think, first—were she not most hardened of all women born, ne'er would she have sent these libations, in dissembled hate, to crown the grave of him whom verily she slew. Look to it—is it likely that the corpse ensepulchred will take with lovingkindness these offerings from her, by whom he died dishonoured, like one loathed, and was marred by her mishewing?—yea, on his head she wiped her blood-dabbled hands as for cleansing of the sin! canst thou deem that what thou bringest can assoil her of the murder? It may not be!—nay, cast these hence—and do thou clip from thine head and mine—ah, well-a-day!—our tresses' utmost growth, and dedicate to him this—scant sacrifice indeed, yet all I have to proffer—this tress dry of unguents, and my girdle, not pranked with gauds: there kneel, and pray that from earth's bosom he may come back, benign of will to usward, and vengeful to his foes; and that the young Orestes may live to set foot, in triumphant power, upon the necks of his enemies; so that thenceforth we may enwreath his tomb with hands more bountiful than those with which we now give what we can. Now I think,

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aye, verily, that he too of intent did send upon her sleep these visions of grim aspect. Howe'er this be, do thou, O sister, achieve this service that saves thyself, and me, and him we love best of all men, even thy sire and mine, who lieth in the house of Hades.

CHOR. Words of loving duty the maiden speaketh; and thou, sweet friend, if thy will is to be wise, wilt do her bidding.

CHRY. I will; 'tis not wise for twain to debate a duty, but rather to hurry it to the doing. But on my behalf, O friendly maidens, if I attempt these tasks, keep silence in the name of heaven! for if my mother shall learn hereof, I deem that I shall find my venture bitter to me yet. (*Exit Chrysothemis.*)

CHOR. Unless my heart be astray in its prophecy, and void of wise discernment, Justice draweth nigh, with her forewarning might, in power achieving rightful triumph: keen in pursuit she cometh, O child, and that ere long! Confidence thrills through me, who have heard but now these dreams that breathe good tidings. Unmindful is he not, thy sire, the lord of Greece, nor unmindful is the time-worn axe of double edge, that smote with brazen fang, and slaughtered him in vilest treachery.

As with manifold trampling of feet, as with manifold swords, she will come, the Fury shod with brass, who lurks in fearful ambush. For

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there have come fierce strivings for a wedlock dyed in blood, for a bed and a bride forbidden, on those to whom Right denied them. For this, assurance holds me that never, never to our sorrow shall this strange portent come unrue'd by those who did and those who helped the deed. In sooth, no presage can there be for mortals, either in dread visions or in words divine, if this dream of the night shall fail of fulfilment's haven !

Ah, woeful chariot-race of Pelops in the bygone day ! what bane hast thou brought to this our land ! For since Myrtilus sank to sleep, whelmed in the wave, hurled forth headlong in desperate discomfiture from the all-golden car, never yet hath passed from this house the manifold sorrow and shame !

(Enter Clytaemnestra.)

CLYT. So then, it seems, thou roamest abroad unrestrained,—for Aegisthus is afar ; he ever held thee from doing shame to thy kin by straying without the gates. But now that he is absent, of me thou holdest no respect. Yet oft and to full many a man thou hast averred that I rule arrogantly and beyond the right, insulting both thee and thy cause. But with insult have I nought to do ; I do but taunt thee after bearing many a taunt from thee. For thy father, nought else, is ever thy pretext,—how that by my hand, mine, he died ! Aye, mine—I know it well, and for me is no denial hereof. Yet not I alone,

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but Justice too, slew him : and with Justice oughtest thou to take side, if thou wert wise of heart. For this father of thine, for whom thou wailest unceasingly, alone among the Greeks could steel his heart to offer thine own sister a victim to the gods—he, who begat her, nor shared the travail with me, who bare her. So be it—tell me now, why and on whose behalf he sacrificed her? Wilt say *For the Greeks*? But it was not in their right to slay child of mine. Perhaps, forsooth, he slew my offspring for his brother Menelaus' sake—was he not then bound to expiate to me this wrong? Had not Menelaus himself two children, whom, more than mine, it was meet to sacrifice, born as they were of himself and of that mother for whose sake that fleet went forth? Or could Hades have had strange craving to devour offspring of mine rather than of Helen? Or had their accursed sire put aside all love for the children born of me, while he was loving to those of Menelaus? Was not such deed the sign of a reckless and perverted father? In truth I deem so—even if I thus speak at variance with thy thought; even she that was slain would say as I, could she have voice again. Therefore I feel no remorse for what is done; and if I seem to thee unnatural of heart, get just discernment before thou blamest thy neighbour.

ELECT. This time at least thou canst not say that I was first to assail thee with some grievous word,

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and then heard these taunts from thee. But, with thy leave, I would plead aright for him that is dead and for my sister too.

CLYT. My leave indeed thou hast ; if such were thy wonted manner of address, less grievous wouldst thou be for me to hear.

ELECT. Then verily I challenge thee. Thou dost confess thyself my father's slayer—what avowal could dye thee more darkly than this, whether the deed were provoked or no ? and I will prove to thee that not in justice' cause didst thou slay him ; nay, it was the luring of a vile man that drew thee on, the man whose life thou sharest now. For ask the huntress Artemis, in revenge of what wrong she bound the many winds at Aulis—or I will tell thee, since from her thou mayest not win a word. My father once—so I have heard the tale—roaming for the chase within the holy woodland of the goddess, roused by his footfall a dappled antlered hart, which, uttering some vaunt over its slaying, he smote with dart well-aimed ; and, wroth hereat, the daughter of Leto detained the Achaeans till my sire in atonement for the slain quarry should offer up his own child. So befel her sacrifice ; no other release was there for the armament, homeward or to Troy. Therefore, reluctant and by strong constraint, he yielded hardly, and did sacrifice her, not for Menelaus' sake. And yet—for I will con-

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strue his deed as thou dost—if in desire to aid that brother he did it, should he, for that, have died by hand of thine? what manner of ordinance is that? Beware, lest by laying down this law for men thou ordain a woe unto thyself, and late remorse. For if we shall take life for life, thou verily wouldst be the first to die, if justice were thy meed. Nay, look to it, that thou art not fashioning a lying plea. For, if thou wilt, tell me why thou art living now in acts most shameful, couching with the vile murderer who aided thee of old to slay my father, and quickening his seed, while thou hast cast out the duteous children born of rightful wedlock. What pardon could I find for this? or canst thou plead that in this too thou dost avenge thy daughter? a vengeance vile, even if thou pleadest so! for 'tis dishonour to mate with the foeman of the house, even to avenge a daughter! Yet may one never even admonish thee; thou dost break out in full cry that I revile my mother! Indeed, I hold thee more mistress than mother to us—for I live a slave's life, beset with manifold oppressions from thee and that mate of thine! and that other child, who hardly escaped from thine hand, the lorn Orestes, wears out his life in misery; often hast thou railed at me that I foster him as one to wreak revenge on thee; and this, be well assured, had I had force, I had will to do! For this, go to! proclaim me, if thou wilt, to the world,

emotional relief of

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as vile, or scandalous of tongue, or fulfilled of shamelessness ! For if my nature wotteth aught of such ways, it may be that I do not belie my birth from thee.

CHOR. I see her breathing the breath of wrath, but I discern no longer any thought in her whether she stands on Justice' side.

CLYT. And now what thought need I have, at least towards her ? since with such utterance, and at her years, she rails upon her mother. Think you not she would dare any extremity and feel no shame ?

ELECT. Know well, albeit I seem otherwise to thee, that shame possesses me for what I do ; I feel mine acts unseasonable and ill beseeming. But thy malice, and the acts thou doest, drive me perforce to bear myself thus ; ill deeds make ill deeds done.

CLYT. Vile thing, reared up to shamelessness ! truly I, and words and deeds of mine, do make thee overfull of words !

ELECT. Thou sayest them, thou, not I ; for thou doest the deed, and deeds bring words to utterance.

CLYT. Nay, by our lady Artemis, thou shalt not elude the meed of this hardihood, whene'er Aegisthus comes back.

ELECT. See now, thou art hurried off to passion, though thou didst give consent that I should speak my will ; thou hast no ears to hear.

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CLYT. Wilt thou not hush this ado and let me do sacrifice, now that I have given thee utmost privilege of speech ?

ELECT. Yea, I let thee, I exhort—on to the sacrifice ! nor blame my utterance more : henceforth I will speak no word.

CLYT. Uplift then, thou handmaid, the sacrificial gifts of fruitage manifold, that to yon Sun-King I may proffer prayers for relief from the terrors that beset me now. Hear, O Phoebus, buckler of my salvation, my dissembled speech ; for not among friends is this utterance, nor beseems it to unfold to the light all my petition while she is yet near to me ; lest in her hatred and with voluble outcry she scatter malicious rumour o'er all the city. Nay, hear me even thus, for thus on my part must I pray. The visions of bewildering dreams that last night I beheld, do thou, O Lycean King, if their showing presaged good, bring to fulfilment ; if they imported ill, divert them on my foes ! and if there be who scheme to cast me down by craft from my present weal, give them not way, but grant that I, living ever thus in easeful safety, may sway the house of the Atridae and the sceptre of this realm, linked in love and blissful days with those whose life I share now, and with all my children who scowl not upon me nor bring the grief of bitterness. Hear thou this prayer with grace, O Lycean Apollo, and to all

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of us grant whatever we ask openly ; all other wishes of mine, I hold it for truth that thou by thy divinity knowest well, though I speak them not ; needs must the children of Zeus descry all things.

(Enter Paedagogus.)

PAED. Ye stranger ladies, how might I be well assured if this be the palace of the king Aegisthus ?

CHOR. It is, O stranger ; thou thyself hast guessed aright.

PAED. And do I verily guess aright that this is his consort ? for to the eye she stands forth a queen.

CHOR. Assuredly ; 'tis the queen whose presence is before thee.

PAED. All hail, O queen ! I come bearing from a friendly chief tidings welcome unto thee and eke unto Aegisthus.

CLYT. I bid the omen hail ! but first of all I would know of thee what mortal sent thee here ?

PAED. Phanoteus the Phocian, conveying to thee a thing of high import.

CLYT. What manner of thing, O guest ? for, coming from one friendly to us, thou wilt, I well know, speak friendly tidings.

PAED. Orestes is no more. In brief compass I tell the tale.

ELECT. Ah, woe upon me, woe ! this day is death to me !

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CLYT. How sayest thou, O guest?—heed not her—
how sayest thou?

PAED. Orestes is no more! 'tis but my former word
renewed.

ELECT. I am undone, alas! life holds no more for
me.

CLYT. (*To Electra.*) Keep thy sorrow to thyself—
but thou, O guest (*to Paedagogus*), to me tell out the
truth, how death befel him. *justified*

PAED. As for this purpose I was sent, so will I
recount the whole. Know, that he came unto the
pageant of the festival, the glory of Hellas, for the
Delphic contests; and when he heard the high pro-
claim of him who heralded the foot-race, whereof
should be the first award, he came down to the
contest in splendour of youth, admired of all who
stood there, and speeding round the course he made
the starting-place the goal, and issued forth with
the supreme meed of victory. Let me tell in few
words the tale of many glories—I ne'er knew deeds
and prowess like his, in any other man. Know this
one thing—in all the races of the double course for
which the arbiters proclaimed the wonted prizes, he
bore off in all the palms of victory, and was hailed
with acclaim of joy, and men cried out first, *An
Argive!* and then, *Orestes, child of Agamemnon, who
on a day mustered the renowned armament of Hellas!*
So fared he at the first—yet when some deity wills

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to overthrow, not even a strong man can scape. For on another day, when was held, at sundawn, the fiery-footed strife of horses and of cars, he entered, with many a rival charioteer. One was of Achaia; and one of Sparta; and twain of Libya, lords of the well-yoked cars; and fifth among them was Orestes' self, driving Thessalian mares; and sixth was an Aetolian, with bay fillies; the seventh was a Magnesian; and the eighth was of the Aenian clan, and his team was white; and the ninth was from Athens, the city that the gods built; and one more, a Boeotian, manned the tenth car. Then stood they where the appointed arbiters ranged them by decision of lots shaken forth, and ranked the chariots; and at the brazen trumpet's swell they dashed away, and each at once, with cheering call to his steeds, shook the reins; and all the course was in turmoil with the din of rattling cars; up whirled the dust, and all, pell-mell together, spared not the goad, in order that each might thrust him forward, past others' wheels and the snorting nostrils of their steeds; for close upon their flanks at once, and close upon the fellies of their wheels, foamed forward and came beating the panting of the steeds. But Orestes, at each round, kept his axle-box close to the limit-pillar as he turned, and, giving slack rein to the right-hand trace-horse, bore hard upon the near one. And thus at the first the cars held their course erect;

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but after a while the hard-mouthed colts of the Aenian man broke away, and with a swerve, just as they passed from the sixth to the seventh round, dashed their fronts against the Barcaean team ; and thereupon, from one collision, car crashed on car and toppled over, and all the Crisaeon course was full of the wrecks of chariot and of steed. Then, seeing his chance, the wary Athenian charioteer drew sideways and rode out the storm, evading the surge of steeds that swirled in the midst of the course. But Orestes on his part was driving in the rear, curbing back his team, with his hope set on the finish ; but when he saw the Athenian left his sole rival on the course, he launched a shrill ear-piercing cry, and dashed after him with his mares at stretch of speed, and anon they both scoured with level yokes, now one and now the other showing his head in front, bent forward over his team. Thus all the remaining rounds he, the ill-fated, drove in safety—erect himself, erect his chariot ; but at last, slackening his left rein as the horse slewed round, he grazed the pillar's edge unawares, and crashed in the axle-socket, and toppled from his car, and was rapt along, tangled in the shapely reins ; and as he was hurled to earth, his mares swerved, unguided, into the interspace of the course. And when the folk beheld him fallen from his car, they shrieked in sorrow for the youth, that, with such glory achieved,

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he gains so dread a fall—now battered upon earth, and now with legs tossed toward the sky; till at the last the car-drivers, staying with a struggle the scouring steeds, loosed him from the reins, wallowing in blood, so that no friend could have recognised his miserable frame. Then, delaying not, they burned him on a pyre; and chosen men of Phocis are bearing hither in a little urn of bronze those once mighty limbs, now turned to piteous dust—that he may inherit a grave in his fatherland. Such then, mark you, was this mischance, grievous to hear as told; but to those who witnessed it, as did we, the worst of all disasters I have beheld.

CHOR. Alas, alas! with utter uprooting, methinks, hath all their lineage perished from our ancient lords!

CLYT. Zeus, what importeth this? dare I to call it happy chance? or dread disaster yet full of gain to me? rueful is it if I am to win safety through mine own bereavement.

PAED. Why art thou thus saddened, O lady, at this tale?

CLYT. Strange is the tie of motherhood; not though one be sinned against can a mother hate her child.

PAED. Then is our journey taken for nought, it seems.

CLYT. Nay, not so—how could thy tale be for nought? if thou camest bearing sure proofs of his

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death, who, born of my life yet sundering himself from my breasts and nursing care, banished and estranged himself, and, once parted from this land, saw me no more ; yet casting on me the charge that I slew his sire, was full of threats of vengeance to be wreaked ; so that not by night nor day did gentle sleep o'ershadow me, but time and the morrow's imminence lingered me on as one ever on the verge of death. But now—for on this day am I released from fear, alike of him and of this woman here—a worse bane, she, to me, dwelling at my side and sucking mine essential heart's-blood from me !—now, I trow, shall we, defying her threats, lead our days in quietness !

ELECT. Ah, woe is me ! for now, Orestes, is the hour to cry woe for thy mischance ! since thus thou liest low, and art mocked of this thy mother. Stands this with justice ?

CLYT. Thou standest not with justice ! for him, to lie as he lies is just !

ELECT. Hearken, O Nemesis, that avengest the newly dead !

CLYT. She hearkened to the rightful prayer, and ordained the issue well.

ELECT. Taunt as thou wilt ; for now is thine hour of triumph !

CLYT. Ah, then will not Orestes and thou stay this triumph ?

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ELECT. We are stayed ourselves—no thought of staying thee!

CLYT. (*To Paedagogus.*) Sir, thy coming would deserve rich reward, if thou couldst stay this woman's clamorous outcry.

PAED. Well, let me depart, if my errand is well done.

CLYT. Nay, nay! for that were to fare unworthily of me and of our friend who sent thee. Rather come thou within, and leave this woman here without, to make her ado for her own ills and those of her friends. (*Exit Clytaemnestra with Paedagogus.*)

ELECT. Now seems she,—think you?—like one grieved and agonised, sorely to weep and cry out, wretch that she is, over her son thus sadly done to death? Nay, she passed in with sneering joy. Ah, woe is me! Ah, well-loved Orestes, how by dying hast thou brought me to nothingness! For gone thou art and hast rent away from my soul the only hopes that yet survived for me—hopes that thou wouldst come some day with living hand to avenge our sire, and me the forlorn. And now whither may I turn? For alone I am, bereaved of thee and of my father; henceforth I must be slave again, under those whom most of all men I abominate, the slayers of my sire. Is not such my happy state? Nay, 'tis not for me, in the days to come, to pass in and dwell with them! but here at this gate I will

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cast me down and let my life waste away, without a friend. Now let who will, of those who dwell within, slay me if he chafes hereat ! for if he gives death, yea, I thank him for the boon, and if I live, it is but pain—love of life is no more.

CHOR. Ah, where are the lightnings of Zeus, or where the flaming Sun, if they look on these wrongs, and lie at rest, and show them not to the world ?

ELECT. Woe, woe, and well-a-day !

CHOR. Ah child, why yieldest thou to tears ?

ELECT. Alas !

CHOR. Cry out no impious word !

ELECT. Thou wilt be my death——

CHOR. But how ?

ELECT. If thou shalt even breathe a hope of those so surely gone to the underworld, doubly wilt thou trample on me who am wasting with despair.

CHOR. I know how King Amphiaraus, through snares of a woman's golden gauds, was lost in earth : and now in underworld——

ELECT. Alack, alack !

CHOR. He reigns in ghostly potency.

ELECT. Ah, woe !

CHOR. Yea, woe ! for the traitress——

ELECT. She was slain !

CHOR. Even so !

ELECT. Ah yes, I know it well ! For an avenge

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rose, for him the mourning dead ! But for me is no one left !—he who was left to me awhile, is rapt away and gone !

CHOR. Sad art thou, sad thy chance !

ELECT. Yea, I know this well, all too well, in this my life into whose every month henceforth sweeps ever dread and ever shameful sorrow.

CHOR. We witnessed thy sorrow's tale !

ELECT. Beguile me not now, when no longer——

CHOR. What sayest thou ?

ELECT. Remaineth help from hopes in a brother, son of my noble sire !

CHOR. To every mortal, death is nature's ordinance.

ELECT. Is it the common lot, as for him the ill-starred, in contest of flying hoofs to be tangled in the shapely reins that haled him ?

CHOR. That horror passeth thought !

ELECT. Aye truly ! if in foreign land, untended by my hands——

CHOR. Woe worth the day !

ELECT. He lieth in earth, without sepulture or dirge of ours !
(*Enter Chrysothemis.*)

CHRY. In ecstasy, sweet sister, and laying aside maidenly reserve, I come speeding unto thee ; for I bear tidings of joy and respite from the ills that thou hast long suffered, long bemoaned !

ELECT. And whence canst thou have found help for my sorrows, for which no healing can be descried ?

4 advance warning
THE ELECTRA

CHRYSES. Orestes' self is near us—listen and mark my tale—clearly as thou seest me !

ELECTRA. Nay, poor wretch ! art thou verily beside thyself, and wildly mocking thine own sorrows and mine ?

CHRYSES. Nay, by our father's hearth, not in wild mockery I speak, but of himself, here present at our side !

ELECTRA. Alas for me ! now from what mortal didst thou hear this tale and believest it overmuch ?

CHRYSES. Myself, with mine own eyes and not another's, did see sure proofs of it, and hence I trust the tale.

ELECTRA. Poor wretch ! what proof worth trust hast thou seen ? say, whither lookest thou and kindest in thyself hope's cureless fever ?

CHRYSES. Nay, by the gods, listen to me ! that after hearing my tale thou mayest henceforth style me wise or crazy !

ELECTRA. Then say thy say, if aught of joy attends thee in the telling.

CHRYSES. Then I do tell you all I witnessed. Know, when I came to our sire's time-honoured tomb, I saw streams of milk new-flowing from the hillock's ridge, and my father's grave wreathed with a coronal of all the flowers. I beheld and marvelled and gazed around, lest a mortal should be lurking anywhere near my side. But when I saw that all around was tranquillity, I moved nearer to the grave, and on its

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topmost ridge beheld a curl newly shorn. And as in sadness I gazed, suddenly there struck upon my soul a semblance, as of a thing familiar to my thought, a fancy that in this curl I saw a token of Orestes, best-beloved of men. And lifting it in my hands I restrained all words that might do hurt; but in a trice mine eyes were brimming with tears of joy: for now, even as then, I wot well that this shining gift came from no other than Orestes. From whom but him, save thee and me, was such an offering meet? yet I offered it not, as well I know, nor didst thou—how was it possible? thou who mayst not with impunity go forth from this house, even to shrines of gods! (Nay, and still less doth my mother's heart delight to render such an offering, nor, had she done it, could she have escaped our sight.) Nay, by Orestes are they given, these grave-offerings! Take cheer, sweet sister! not for ever does the same destiny dog the same man's side—ours heretofore was hateful, but this present day perchance shall stand as pledged earnest of manifold joys.

ELECT. Alas for thy foolish faith! how all this while I pity it!

CHRY. What meanest thou? tell I not this tale to thy pleasure?

ELECT. Thou knowest not whither on earth thou wanderest, whither in thy mind!

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CHRYE. Nay, how should I not know the things which I myself did see?

ELECT. Poor soul! he is dead, and all he might have done to save you is gone with him; look no more to him for aid.

CHRYE. Alas, alas! from what man didst thou hear this?

ELECT. From one who stood hard by when he met his death.

CHRYE. Where is the man? truly I thrill with wonder.

ELECT. He is within, no grievous guest but welcome to our mother.

CHRYE. Ah me! then by what man were brought the manifold gifts to our father's grave?

ELECT. Most like, I think, it is, that some one laid them there as memorials of Orestes dead.

CHRYE. Ah, well-a-day! and I was speeding hither with all this tale, in joy! and knew not, it seems, what woes beset us: now, having come, I find the old sorrows, and others withal.

ELECT. See thou, so it stands. But if thou wilt follow my word, thou wilt lighten the burden of woe that now lies on us.

CHRYE. What! shall I make the dead rise up?

ELECT. Nay, that I said not; no such folly is in my mind.

CHRYE. Then what dost thou command which I avail to perform?

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ELECT. That thou shouldest dare and do whatever I command.

CHRY. Well, if there be help in it, I will not put it from me.

ELECT. See thou, without effort success there cannot be.

CHRY. Yea, that I see : to mine utmost strength I will bear a hand.

ELECT. Hear then in what sort I am resolved to act. Thou knowest, I think, thou too, that no help of kin is there for us any more ; the god of death hath ta'en them and bereaved us, and we twain are left alone. Now I, so long as I had tidings that our brother was yet strong in life, held hopes that he would one day come as avenger of our father's murder. But now that he is no more, to thee I look, next, to shrink not, but, with this thy sister's aid, to slay Aegisthus, our sire's murderer ; no need to veil any longer my design from thee ! For whither looking, and to what yet stablished hope, canst thou remain inert ? thou whose lot it is to mourn, despoiled of thine heritage of our ancestral wealth, and to sorrow for thine own years waning fast away without wedlock or bridal joys ; and have thou no hope that thou shalt ever win thereto—Aegisthus bears too shrewd a brain to let any child be born of thee or me, for sure vengeance upon him ! But if thou follow out the plot I have laid, thou shalt win,

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first, from thy sire down in the world of death, and from thy brother, fair name for dutiful love; and, further, thou shalt be owned henceforth as free as thou wert at birth; and worthy wedlock shall be thine; men look with love on nobleness in women. Nay, more—seest thou not what wide repute and renown thou wilt attach to thyself and me, if thou followest my will? What man, be he citizen or stranger, who looks on us, but will greet us with such praise as this—*Behold, O comrades, these sisters twain who rescued their father's home! who once, nobly reckless of life itself, stood forth to deal out death to their enemies in pride of place! These must all men love, all men revere; these, at each festival and in the city's whole concourse, all men must honour for their courage.* Thus will every man aver concerning us twain, so that neither in life nor death will our glory fail. Ah beloved, follow thou me, strive on thy father's side, take part with thy brother, give me, give thyself, surcease of woe, remembering this, that 'tis ignoble for the nobly-born to live in base submission.

CHOR. When things stand thus, forethought is a trusty ally, both to him who speaks and him who hears.

CHRY. (*To the Chorus.*) O women, had she not been void of discernment, she, ere she spoke, would have held by caution as wholly as she discards it now.

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(*To Electra.*) Whither turnest thou thine eyes for help, when thou puttest on such armour of daring and biddest me serve thy purpose? Seest thou not? thou art a woman, not a man, and thy hand is less strong than thy foemen's; and fortune, on their side, is in the ascendant daily, while on ours she sinks away and wanes to nothingness. Who, then, that schemes to slay a man so powerful, shall come off without rueing his fatal scheme? See to it, lest in our evil plight we incur worse evils yet, if any one shall overhear thy speech: no freedom, no advantage doth it bring to us, to win fair repute, but die a shameful death; mere death is not the worst of agonies, but, rather, to crave for death and be debarred from dying. Nay, I beseech thee, ere we perish in utter wreck and bring our line to desolation, keep thy passion curbed! for what thou hast said, I will guard it as unspoken and without effect: do thou thyself resolve, though late, as thou art strengthless, to submit unto the strong.

CHOR. Be thou persuaded! No gain is there, for man's winning, better than forethought and wise discernment.

ELECT. In all hast thou spoken as I foresaw; well I knew that thou wouldst cast away what I urged on thee. Yet must the deed be done by me and mine own unaided hand, for undone it shall not be left.

CHRS. Well-a-day! hadst thou but been so fixed

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of purpose when my father died ! thou mightest have wreaked all thy will.

ELECT. Such verily I was, in heart, but feebler in discernment then !

CHRY. Such as in discernment thou wast then, strive to remain for ever.

ELECT. That is the chiding word of one who wills not to help.

CHRY. Even so ; for ill attempt doth end in ill fortune.

ELECT. I envy thee thy shrewdness, loathe thee for thy cowardice.

CHRY. I will listen and endure, aye, even when thou praisest me.

ELECT. Nay, from me at least, that pain shall ne'er befall thee !

CHRY. A future too there is, long enough to test that resolve.

ELECT. Away from me, thou in whom is no help !

CHRY. Help is there in me, but in thee no sense to learn.

ELECT. Go, tell all that I have said, to thy mother—she is thine !

CHRY. Nay, on my part, I hate thee not with so fell a hate.

ELECT. Yet learn at least to what dishonour thou leadest me !

*qualifies
with sister*

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CHRY. I dishonour thee not, but am wary for thy good.

ELECT. Thy sense of right, forsooth ! is that my rule to follow ?

CHRY. Aye, till thou art wise ; then thou shalt be guide of us twain !

ELECT. 'Tis the world's ill way, that one may gloze the right and yet be wrong !

CHRY. Thou namest aright the very ill to which thou cleavest.

ELECT. How ? seem I not to thee to plead the rightful cause ?

CHRY. Aye, but circumstance can make right itself harmful.

ELECT. I choose not to live my life by rules like that.

CHRY. If thou act out thine intent, thou wilt approve my counsel soon.

ELECT. Pshaw, I will act it out, in no alarm of thee.

CHRY. And is that verity ? wilt thou not consider it again ?

ELECT. Nay, nought is baser than bad counsel.

CHRY. Of all I say, thou seemest to hold nought in heed.

ELECT. Not now, but long since hath my resolve been made.

CHRY. Then will I depart ; for thou hast as little

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heart to commend my words as I to commend thy ways.

ELECT. Have done, and go within! never will I follow after thee, not though thou shouldest yearn deeply for me ; sheer unwisdom is it, even to quest for help with no heart in it.

CHRY. Well, if thou canst persuade thyself thou reasonest well, so reason : as soon as thou standest beset with troubles, thou wilt say my words were wise. *(Exit Chrysothemis.)*

CHOR. Ah, wherefore, when we behold the birds of air, in highest instinct tending and nourishing those by whom they were bred and fostered, do we not match our service with theirs? No, by the levin-bolt of Zeus, and by heavenly Themis, we mortals rest not long unpunished. O Voice that echoes through earth unto the dead, peal out, I pray, a piteous call to those of Atreus' line who sleep below, telling them the tale of shame, too dark for dance and song! Tell them their house is sick now unto death ; and on their children's part the double cry of contest can no more be attuned to a life of love and unity. And forlorn Electra rocks on trouble's sea, moaning miserably for her sire, the livelong time, even as the ever-mourning nightingale ; no heed hath she to escape death, nay, she is ready to plunge in blind night, when once she hath cut off the two-fold horror of the home. Could child be born more true to lineage than she ?

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For never doth a generous soul will to abase its glory by a life of dishonour, with name and fame effaced ; and thou, ah child, ah child, couldst choose a dolorous life that links thee to thy kin, having warred down dishonour, so as to gain at once a double praise, renown of forethought and of a daughter's truest loyalty.

side
I pray that thou mayst live in power and wealth as much above thy foes as now thou livest subjected. For I have found thee set in no prosperous destiny, but, in all ordinances fashioned for supremacy, in these thou winnest virtue's highest crown, through piety toward Zeus.

(Enter Orestes, Pylades, and Attendants, bearing a funeral urn.)

OR. O ladies, heard we aright, and journey we as rightly whither we desire to come ?

CHOR. What seekest thou ? in what desire art thou come ?

OR. For no short while am I in quest of Aegisthus' dwelling-place.

CHOR. Then comest thou aright, and he who told thee is assoiled of blame.

OR. Which then of you would announce, to those within, the longed-for advent of our companion feet ?

CHOR. This lady—if nearest kin be best bearer of tidings.

OR. Prithce go then, O lady, and pass within, and

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announce that certain Phocian men are fain to find Aegisthus.

ELECT. Alack for me ! surely ye bear not the manifest proof of the tidings that we heard ?

OR. I know nought of thy rumour ; but the old chief Strophius bade me bear news concerning Orestes.

ELECT. What news, O stranger ? ah, what shudder thrills thro' me ?

OR. We bear and bring, as thou seest, the sorry relics of him dead, shut in a scanty urn.

ELECT. Alas, alas ! now is all that tale made sure ! now seems it that I behold the burden of my sorrow borne in your hands !

OR. If thou hast aught to bewail in the doom of Orestes, know that this urn conceals the body that was he.

ELECT. Ah, stranger ! for the love of heaven give o'er the urn unto mine hands, as it holds him within ! so let me weep and wail out my woe, for myself, and all my lineage, and these ashes too !

OR. (*To Attendants.*) Bear it hither and give it o'er to her, whoe'er she be ; for not as one with enmity at heart doth she entreat it ; sure she must be some friend or kinswoman.

ELECT. O last memorial of the dearest thing on earth to me, even of the life of Orestes, how I receive thee with thwarted hopes, not those where-

does he do⁴⁵

this cruel thing because I want the
is insecure I want the
see the true sorrowing
him
No

THE ELECTRA

with I sent thee forth ! For lo, to-day I lift thee in my hands, a thing of nothingness—even I who sent thee forth from these halls in the glory of thy youth ! Ah, would that I had died myself, or ever I stole thee with these hands and sent thee forth to a strange land and rescued thee from the hand of murder ! So mightest thou have lain down in death, on that bygone day, inheriting with me a share in our father's grave. Now, far from home, an exile in another land, thou hast perished ruefully, and far from thy sister's side ; nor, well-a-day ! could I with loving hands do lustral duties to thy corpse, nor lift, with fitting rites, the piteous burden of thine ashes from the wide-blazing pyre : but, tended for the grave by hands of strangers, thou comest hither, a little burden within a little urn ! Ah, woe is me, how fruitless was all my fostering of old, wherewith I oft encompassed thee—a labour that physicked pain ! for never wert thou more dear to thy mother's self than to me ; no underling did cherish thee, but I—and *Sister, sister !* was ever thy cry unto me ! Now in one day is all gone by as thou art gone—like some whirlwind, thou hast past away, and rapt all things with thee. [Gone is my father ; dead am I to thee ; thyself art gone down to death ; and hark ! the laughter of our foes, and the wild joy of our mother—mother in name, not heart ! concerning whom, thou didst so oft send whispered rumours of

THE ELECTRA

thy coming and the vengeance to be !] But all this, the baleful power that broodeth over thee and me hath rapt away ; aye, thus he hath sent thee back to me, thy well-loved form dissolved in ashes, and dwindled to an insubstantial shade. Woe for thy piteous corse ! and woe and well-a-day for the sad paths on which thou hast been borne homeward ! ah best-beloved, ah brotherly head, 'tis death, sheer death that thou hast brought to me ! Thou therefore give me welcome into this urn, thy home ; take to thy nothingness me who am nothing, that with thee I may dwell henceforth in the underworld : for of a truth, while yet thou wert on earth, I shared all things alike with thee ; and now I crave some portion of thy tomb, in death ; for I see that, in the grave, mourners mourn no more.

CHOR. Bethink thee, Electra—of a mortal sire wert thou born, and mortal was Orestes—therefore lament not overmuch ; to the same lot must we come, one and all.

OR. Alas, alas ! what shall I plead ? whitherward in words can I flee in my distraction ? for I can rule my tongue no more.

ELECT. What pang is thine ? wherefore hast thou uttered this ?

OR. Is thine the aspect of Electra, high in fame ?

ELECT. Yea, this form is hers, and all beset with sorrow.

THE ELECTRA

OR. Woe is me then for this piteous mischance.

ELECT. Sir, can it be for me that thou lamentest thus ?

OR. O form dishonourably, impiously marred.

ELECT. Thou speakest sorrow fit for none but me, O stranger !

OR. Alas ! for this unwedded, hapless life of thine !

ELECT. Sir, wherefore thus on me dost thou gaze, and weep the while ?

OR. How I knew nought, it seems, of evils that in truth were mine !

ELECT. Thine ? in which of our words didst thou read thy pain ?

OR. In seeing thee conspicuous in manifold sorrows.

ELECT. Yet but a stinted portion of my woes is before thine eyes.

OR. Ah, how could there be other woes more hateful to behold ?

ELECT. Even these—that I am housed with the murderers——

OR. Of whom ? whence is this horror at which thou hintest ?

ELECT. Murderers of my sire ! and more, I serve them as a slave, perforce.

OR. And who of mortals urges thee to this compulsion ?

ELECT. One called my mother—yet in no act doth she match the name.

THE ELECTRA

OR. How treating thee? with violence of hand,
or abasement of thy life?

ELECT. By violence, by abasements, by all manner
of malice!

OR. Stands there no one to aid thee, nor to
thwart her will?

ELECT. Never a one; one there was—thou gavest
me his ashes but now!

OR. Ill-starred maiden! how the sight of thee has
made me pity thee!

ELECT. Then know thou art the only mortal that
ever gave me pity!

OR. For I stand here, the one true sharer of thy
sorrows.

ELECT. Surely thou art not here as anyway akin
to us?

OR. I could speak out, if those beside us were
friendly.

ELECT. Nay, they are friendly, and thou wilt speak
to loyal ears.

OR. Lay by that urn then, that thou mayest hear
all revealed.

ELECT. Ah no, sir! by the gods, do me not this
despite.

OR. Obey my word, and thou shalt not do amiss.

ELECT. I implore thee by thy beard, take not from
me my dearest memory!

OR. I say I will not leave it with thee!

brother-sister argument

THE ELECTRA

ELECT. Ah, woe is me for thee, Orestes, if I must be debarred from laying thee in earth !

OR. Hush thy sad words ! thy weeping hath no rightful cause.

ELECT. Weep I not rightfully, weeping a brother dead ?

OR. Thou hast no call to speak that word over him.

ELECT. Am I then so little honoured of the dead ?

OR. Thou art dishonoured of none ; but this duty pertaineth not to thee.

ELECT. It doth, if verily I am clasping that which was Orestes.

OR. Nay, it is not Orestes, save in mere show of speech.

ELECT. Then where is he ensepulchred, whose fate was so woeful ?

OR. Nowhere ! the living hath no grave.

ELECT. How sayest thou, young sir ?

OR. No falsehood is there in what I say !

ELECT. How ? liveth he yet ?

OR. As surely as my life is in me.

ELECT. What ? art thou he ?

OR. Look thou on this seal, once our father's, and judge if I speak sooth !

ELECT. O day of bliss !

OR. Bliss—yea, I say as thou !

ELECT. O living voice, art thou come ?

THE ELECTRA

OR. Henceforth, ask of me from no other !

ELECT. Hold I thee in mine arms ?

OR. Aye ! as to life's end mayst thou hold me !

ELECT. Ah dearest maidens, ah countrywomen, behold ! this is Orestes, by artifice held for dead, and now by that artifice brought safe unto his home !

CHOR. Yea, we behold him, O child ! and the tear of joy steals from our eyes, welcoming what hath chanced.

ELECT. O offspring, offspring of my beloved sire ! thou art here, even now, finding, coming, seeing thy heart's desire !

OR. I stand beside thee—yet hush and bide the time.

ELECT. What need thereof ?

OR. Hush ! better is silence, lest some one hear from within.

ELECT. Nay, by Artemis, the ever-pure ! I will ne'er demean me to fear the women-folk, useless cumberers, home-keeping evermore !

OR. Yet bethink thee, how women too can strike the blow of battle ! thou know'st it well, not unproved therein !

ELECT. Ah well-a-day ! Thou thrustest on me a memory no cloud will hide, no surcease make end of, no forgetfulness banish ! memory of our sorrow in its bitterness.

THE ELECTRA

OR. I know it, child, yea, well ! but when the hour to act gives warning, then is it best to raise the memories of those deeds !

ELECT. All time, all time were timely and meet for me to utter forth those deeds with rightful wrath ! for late and hardly have I won this freedom of my tongue.

OR. I say too as thou sayest ; therefore be wary for this freedom——

ELECT. Obeying by what act ?

OR. Forbear to speak at length when the time is untimely !

ELECT. But thou art come, and who could worthily barter right of speech for silence now ? since, beyond thought or hope, mine eyes have won sight of thee !

OR. Then didst thou win that sight, when the gods urged me hitherward.

ELECT. Thou namest a boon surmounting even that which was before, if heaven did urge thee hitherward to our halls ; I see therein a providence of God.

OR. On the one hand I shrink from checking thee in thy joy ; yet on the other I misdoubt thee whom ecstasy o'ercrows !

ELECT. O thou who after long time didst come in mercy, a gracious advent to mine eyes ! forbid me not, whom thou beholdest worn with many pains——

OR. What wouldest thou I should not do ?

THE ELECTRA

ELECT. Make me not forego the joy of thy countenance !

OR. I were right angry, if I saw such will, even in another !

ELECT. Dost thou assent then ?

OR. Surely—what forbiddeth ?

ELECT. (*To the Chorus.*) O kindly maidens, I heard a voice I never could have hoped to hear ! I who once curbed my wrath to silence, who heard and cried not aloud ; woeful was I. But now I have won thee, now hast thou come to me, with aspect best-beloved ! not sorrow's self could take the thought of it from me !

OR. Put away now all superfluity of words ; instruct me not that my mother is vile, nor that Aegisthus drains the ancestral wealth of the palace, spilling this and scattering that, in recklessness : the tale would not suffer thee to keep cautious measure of the time. Tell me rather, what most will fit the present need—by what revealing or concealing of ourselves, we can, through this mine advent, make the laughter of our foes fall to silence ; tell me by what device we can prevent our mother detecting all by thy blithe face, when we twain have entered the palace. Keep up thy lament as for the calamity that was feigned for the telling ; when the hour of triumph comes, then shall we have scope to rejoice and laugh the laugh of freedom.

THE ELECTRA

ELECT. Well, brother mine, even as thou wilt shall my will too incline ; for my joys I earned not of myself, but reaped them from thee ; nor would I suffer myself, by thwarting thee for a moment, to gain a thing of greatest price ; that were ill service to the present providence. In truth, thou knowest how things go here—how otherwise ? thou hearest, first, that Aegisthus is abroad, but that my mother is within ; have thou no fear, concerning her, that she will discern mine aspect bright with joy ; for I am deep-imbued with hatred from of old ; moreover, since I saw thee, joy will not let me cease from tears ; how should I cease, indeed, who in this one short space have beheld thee first dead, then living again ? things incredible hast thou wrought on me ; so that, if my very father came to me in living presence, I should not, as erst, hold it for a portent, but put credence in the vision. Since then thou art so strangely come for my sake, do thou direct me to such deed as thou wilt ; since I, had I been left alone, would have achieved one of two things,—I would have nobly wrought deliverance, or nobly died !

OR. I commend silence now ; for at the portal I hear some one of the inmates coming forth.

(*Enter Paedagogus.*)

ELECT. (*To Orestes and Pylades.*) Pass in, sirs, chiefly welcome in this, that ye bear with you what

THE ELECTRA

no one could repel from this home, nor yet take it to his heart with joy !

PAED. Fools are ye, utter fools, and blinded in your intent ! say, do ye hold now all care for your life as nought ? or is there no discernment in your natural soul ? seeing that not on the verge but in the very midst of dangers the most dire ye stand, and know it not ! Why, if I had not chanced to be watching all the while at this vestibule, your enterprise had been bruited in the house or e'er yourselves came in ! Howbeit, I have provided wariness for this attempt of yours. Now have done with your long greetings and this insatiate ado that hangs upon your joy, and go your ways within ; for in such case to tarry is to fail ; 'tis the hour, now, to make an end.

OR. And when I pass within, how stands the sequel for my hand ?

PAED. It stands aright ; 'tis provided that none shall recognise thee.

OR. Thou hast announced, it seems, the tale that I was dead.

PAED. Aye—doubt not that here thou art held for one of those in Hades.

OR. Rejoice they then herein ? or what chought do they avow ?

PAED. When all is achieved, I will tell thee ; as it stands now, all on their part is well for us, aye, even their ill joy !

THE ELECTRA

ELECT. Brother, who is this man? in heaven's name, say !

OR. Canst thou not divine ?

ELECT. Nay—by no thought can I recall him.

OR. Know'st thou not the man to whom thou didst entrust me erewhile ?

ELECT. How and to whom ? what sayest thou ?

OR. The man by whose hands, through forethought of thine, I was sent forth secretly to Phocis' land.

ELECT. Can this be he whom erst I found of many servants my sole true helper, what time my sire was slain ?

OR. 'Tis he ; test me by no further words.

ELECT. O day of utmost joy ! O thou sole saviour of Agamemnon's line ! how camest thou hither ? art thou truly he who did save this my brother and myself from manifold woes ? O hands beloved ! O thou whose feet have ministered to our joy ! how wert thou here this long time, and I knew thee not, and thou toldest me not, but didst with feigned tidings wreck my life, yet knewest a truth that should transport me with joy ? Hail, O my father—for methinks 'tis a father that I see—hail ! Take this for truth, that on this one day I have both loathed and loved thee beyond all the world !

PAED. Enough hereof, methinks : as for the tale of all the interval, many a night matched with day, and day with night, hold on their circling

THE ELECTRA

course, and shall show thee all these things, Electra, clear at last. Ye twain who stand prepared, I warn you at any rate—now is the hour to smite! now is Clytaemnestra unfriended, now no man of the slaves is within; but if ye now shall dally, bethink you that you must fight anon, not with slaves only but with others too, more numerous and more alert than these.

OR. Pylades, this deed bids us parley no longer, but, with what speed we may, press into the house, saluting first the shrined ancestral images of all gods who dwell in this vestibule.

(Exeunt Orestes and Pylades into the palace, followed by Paedagogus.)

ELECT. O King Apollo, hear them graciously! hear me besides, me who so oft with devout hand did offer of my substance at thy shrine! Now, O Lycean Apollo, with such prayers as I may, I beseech and kneel and supplicate—Be thou our zealous champion in this vengeance we devise—yea, show to men how dire are the penalties which heaven bestows on impiety. *(Exit into the palace.)*

CHOR. See by what path Ares paceth onwards, panting forth the breath of irresistible vengeance. Now, even now, they have passed within the palace, the unshunnable hounds who hunt the track of treacherous deeds! so that now not long shall the vision of my soul tarry nor waver in suspense.

THE ELECTRA

He stealeth beneath the roof-tree, the champion of the powers of death, with crafty footstep, into his father's halls, rich with the wealth of many an age ; and in his hands he bears a thing of death, newly whetted : and Hermes, son of Maia, leadeth them onward to the goal of act, having veiled their craft in darkness, and tarrieth no more. (*Re-enter Electra.*)

ELECT. Hist, well-loved women ! the warriors are in the act—hush, be still !

CHOR. How then ? what is now toward ?

ELECT. Now is she swathing the urn for the sepulchre, and the twain are hard at her side.

CHOR. And thou, why hast thou hurried forth ?

ELECT. To keep watch, lest, unawares to us, Aegisthus pass within. (*A loud cry.*)

CLYT. (*Within.*) Help, help, alack ! O woeful house, and void of loving help, and rife with murderers !

ELECT. Hist!—a cry within—hear ye not, O friends ?

CHOR. I heard things horrible to hear, woe is me ! and shuddered at the sound.

CLYT. (*Within.*) Ah, woe for me, woe ! Aegisthus, where art thou ?

ELECT. Mark !—yet another cry !

CLYT. (*Within.*) O son, son, have pity on thy mother !

ELECT. Nay, but neither thy son, nor his sire who begat him, found pity of thee !

THE ELECTRA

CHOR. Ah realm, ah race forlorn ! now the fate that followed thee day by day, findeth an end, an end ! *

CLYT. (*Within.*) Alack, I am smitten !

ELECT. Deal, if thou canst, a double blow !

CLYT. (*Within.*) Alack again, again !

ELECT. Might but Aegisthus feel each blow too !

CHOR. The curses are working forth the doom ; the buried dead live anew ; men slain long since are draining now, from their slayers, blood shed out for blood. (*Re-enter Orestes and Pylades.*) Lo, they come forth—lo, their hand reeks red from the sacrifice that Ares loves—a sight unspeakable !

ELECT. Orestes, how have ye fared ?

OR. What is done there within is well done, if 'twas well counselled by Apollo.

ELECT. Is she dead, the cursed woman ?

OR. Aye—have no fear henceforth that thy mother's pride can bring thee to dishonour !

CHOR. Hush !—yonder I descry Aegisthus, too clearly for doubt.

ELECT. Back into the house, brave youths !

OR. Where see ye the man ?

ELECT. Ah, he is ours ! he cometh from the suburb in careless joy.

CHOR. Quick, to the vestibule ! now is one half well done—for the rest, act o'er the deed anew !

* Reading σοι for σε, and φθίνει for φθίνειν.

THE ELECTRA

OR. Fear not—we will achieve it !

ELECT. On then ! thou knowest the path.

OR. On the instant am I gone.

(Exit with Pylades.)

ELECT. What here is needed shall be my care.

CHOR. It were wise to gloze something softly into this man's ear, that he may rush unawares into the wrestle with his rightful doom. *(Enter Aegisthus.)*

AEG. Who among you knoweth where are the Phocian strangers, bearing, so men say, tidings for us that Orestes is dead amid the wreck of his chariot ? *(To Electra.)* Thee I ask, thee, aye, thee, who hadst erewhile such hardihood ; thou, I deem, dost care the most, and canst speak with fullest knowledge.

ELECT. Yea, I know all—how not ? else were I stranger to the calamity of my nearest kin !

AEG. Where then are these newcomers ? inform me of them.

ELECT. They are within—for they dealt with a loving hostess !

AEG. Did they in truth announce his death convincingly ?

ELECT. Nay, they did not merely tell it, but showed proof as well.

AEG. Lies then the thing here, for mine eyes to scan it clearly ?

ELECT. Aye, it lies here, a right sorry spectacle !

THE ELECTRA

AEG. Sure, thy words, against thy wont, have made me rejoice amain !

ELECT. Well then, rejoice, if these things come as joy to thee !

AEG. Silence at my word ! and unfold the gates, for all Mycenae, all Argos, to behold ! so that if any man heretofore was buoyed up on vain hopes from this man, he now may see him dead, and own my curb, nor need compulsion to beget wisdom, finding a chastener in me.

ELECT. Lo, on my part, all is obeyed : time hath taught me discernment, so that I consent unto the stronger power.

(The scene opens, disclosing Orestes and Pylades standing over a shrouded corpse.)

AEG. O Zeus ! I gaze on this vision, a thing cast down in death by some jealousy of God—yet I unsay that word, if Nemesis attend it ! Draw off now all the veil that shrouds the face, that from me too the body of a kinsman may have tribute of tears.

OR. Lift it with thine own hand ; not mine it is, but thine, to see and speak words of love to what lieth here.

AEG. Thou redest me aright and I will obey thee ; do thou, if Clytaemnestra chance to be within, bid her hither.

OR. Seek her no more elsewhere ; she is at thy side.

THE ELECTRA

ÆG. (*Lifting the veil from the face.*) Alas, what sight is here ?

OR. At whom dost thou shudder ? whose face bewilders thee ?

ÆG. Whose, whose are the encircling trammels in which I lie forlorn ?

OR. What, seest thou not till now that in error thou speakest of the living as dead ?

ÆG. Alas, I divine that saying ; he that speaketh with me is none other than Orestes' self.

OR. So wise in thy divining, wert thou so long deluded ?

ÆG. Forlorn I am, and all undone—yet suffer me to speak, be it one word !

ELECT. Brother, by heaven ! allow him no further speech, no lengthy pleading ! Of mortals beset with calamity, what man upon the verge of death could gain aught from such reprieve as this ? Nay, slay him out of hand ; and having slain him, give him o'er to such buriers as are meet for him, out of sight of us ! This and nought else can assuage for me the memory of the bygone wrongs.

OR. (*To Aegisthus.*) Go thou within, linger not ; here is not now an issue of words, but of dear life to thee !

ÆG. Why force me within ? if this deed be righteous, what need of darkness ? why art thou slow of hand to slay ?

THE ELECTRA

OR. Dictate not, but go in thither where thou slewest my sire, that on the same spot thou too mayest die !

AEG. Ah, is there utter need that this roof-tree should behold both the present woes of Pelops' house and those that yet shall fall ?

OR. Thine at least it shall behold ! hereof I am a shrewd diviner unto thee.

AEG. A skill then thou boastest which thy father did not own.

OR. Still plea on plea ! and thy journey is delayed. Have done, get thee onward !

AEG. Lead thou the way.

OR. Nay, thou must go forward.

AEG. What, lest I scape thee ?

OR. Nay—lest thou shouldest have aught of thine own way in dying : I must guard this bitterness of death for thee. And well it were that every man who willeth to outstep the law should have this sentence—*Slay him*—fall swift upon him ; then would not villainy wax so great of growth.

CHOR. O seed of Atreus ! after how many sorrows borne, hast thou by struggle issued forth in freedom, crowned with completeness by this emprise !

(*Exeunt.*)

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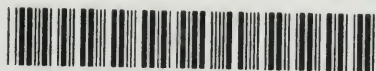
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